



false dichotomies



trollcatz
 [trollcatz](https://trollcatz.livejournal.com/)

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2008-10-26 13:52:00

MOOD:  indescribable

MUSIC: Don't Wanna Know - The Pietasters

I'm thinking, for various reasons, about separation of ~~church and state~~ body and mind, and I'm thinking that there really isn't any such thing. ( [calanthe-b](https://calanthe-b.livejournal.com/) (<https://calanthe-b.livejournal.com/>)), yeah, your cooking post--the one about stupid bodyfuel--had something to do with this.)

We're all geeks.

One things geeks do is we tend to treat our bodies as aliens. Either as machines that can be hacked and tuned and maintained, or as annoying appendages that our brains have to drag around and remember to do the endless maintenance on.

But that's not right.

I didn't figure out until I was a premed and hanging around with College Pagans that my body *is* me. I'm not something that inhabits it. I *am* it. There's no dichotomy. My mind and spirit and intellect and soul are all part of my body. They're not *housed* in it. It's organic. I'm organic. I'm *integral*.

The mortification of the flesh also destroys the soul, because the flesh *is* the soul. You can't burn yourself pure. You *can* distract yourself from other pain--that's why people cut, you know, or starve themselves. Because pain you can control--pain you can choose--is easier to live with than pain you can't control.

I'm not talking about metaphysics here. I don't pretend to have a clue what happens after you die. I'm talking about biology. My chemistry--body and brain--my neural wiring, the intelligence in my meat--what a friend of mine calls the meatware--*is* me. Destroy my brain, I don't exist anymore.

And more than that, the part of me that calls itself "I" isn't actually all that much of the real me. Because there's all this stuff that goes on in the subconscious and unconscious--all this cognition and

intelligence that's contained in things other than the left neocortex--that's all part of me, too. And it happens. It exists. It helps to keep you alive, because the "I" part may have override controls, but there's too much information being processed in that physical intelligence for the "I" to keep track of.

I'm not sure alienating all those parts of me as a matter of course is healthy.

(On the other hand, when you're dealing with an organic illness that affects cognition--obsessive compulsive disorder, or bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia--there are a lot of treatment models that suggest that alienating the *illness* can be not just useful but vital to managing it. If you can retrain your brain to externalize the illness, you can diminish its effect--and modern research into neuroplasticity suggests that this can have a physical effect on the organic matter in your head, by the way.)

When my mom was dying, we had a conversation where I said to her, "You must be so frustrated with your body, failing you like this."

And I still remember what she said, which was that no, she wasn't angry with her body. That she thought her body was like a fragile but loyal and bitterly determined friend, who was going to help her fight the real enemy to its last breath, and she owed it all the support and love she could give it in return.

...okay, that's still not easy to talk about.

Sometimes we alienate from our bodies because they've been badly hurt, or because their needs were not met and now we don't expect them ever to be met so we figure we'd better get on without them, or because we've been conditioned somehow to associate things that should be joys with awfulness.

But we really do need those things. Good food, warmth, affection, sleep, exercise, stimulation, useful work, community. And the lack of any of them affects not just the body or the mind, but both of those things, because they're the same thing.

We are inextricable from our selves. When our bodies are hurt, or tired, or hungry, or lonely, we are hurt, or tired, or hungry, or lonely. When we don't get touched and reassured when we need it, it's not just the meatware that suffers.

We are integrated systems. There is no difference between our bodies and ourselves.

*I don't wanna know where you spent the night
Because if I was to know then baby I just might
Find your little friend
And tell him who I am.*



Thank you

This is Patricia Andreoli, wife of Daphne Worth, who you all knew as Trollcatz. Daphne died

...And there goes the weekend

But hey, we got a day and a half of this one! And I got to sleep in for two whole mornings. Too bad

As a law enforcement professional--

23 comments



erinya [COLLAPSE](#)
October 26 2008, 19:00:54 UTC

Yes. I've thought this for a long time and the realization was crucial to my mental health. I really like the way you've articulated it.



tylirk [COLLAPSE](#)
October 26 2008, 21:38:02 UTC

Oh, now I'm remembering my college days in the Pagan Culture and Spirit Web.

I agree with you completely.

...but it can be really hard. I really came to have solid communications with my body through it being pretty broken. (Spine injury that mostly didn't get the cord - yay! - but major damage to muscles and ligaments of the cervical and thoracic spine and SI joint. Cars are not my friends.) It's why I've become kind of hard core about the martial arts (and I was *so* not a jock) and probably why the neuroscience folks were able to pry me out of biochem. I train for a couple hours a day. I'm kind of obsessive about nutrition... and I get a lot of joy from those things. Being active keeps my spine from falling off, but it also keeps me something like sane.

But this detente has been years in the making, and it still sometimes falls apart, especially when the pain gets too bad (especially since I can be a complete idiot about pain management).



 [trollcatz](#)

[October 26 2008, 22:35:29 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

For me, it's always when I get upset or angry. Negative emotion, you know? I don't want to experience it so I put it away.



 [txanne](#)

[October 26 2008, 22:48:42 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

Oh yeah, I'm dealing with the consequences of that right now. Wishing it gone has stopped working.



 [tylik](#)

[October 27 2008, 00:12:43 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

I do that the most with physical pain. It's kind of scary how good I am at turning off my perception of pain. As it gets worse I'll be thinking less and less clearly, more likely to burst into tears, etc. etc. ...but I still don't feel it as pain, unless I really make myself pay attention. And I am aware of my body, there's just some kind of divert in there. Meanwhile I'm all "why am I in such a bad mood? I must be stressed about something. I must have a bad attitude about this project. I must..." notice the complete lack of "I must have a compressed spinal nerve"!

And then there's the really stupid stuff, like just barely starting to notice that my new shoes might be starting to cause me blisters... so I check only to realize that it's far past blisters and both of my socks are soaked in blood. Oy. Pain happens for a reason, y'know?



 [calanthe_b](#)

[October 26 2008, 22:30:42 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

We are integrated systems. There is no difference between our bodies and ourselves.

Argh, it's too early in the morning here for me to be following this well, but...yeah, at lot of this makes sense.

I may have something more sensible to contribute in a few hours.

Um, but isolating a physical ailment or problem from the rest of your 'self' can sometimes be a useful/necessary step in that it lets you detach from it emotionally and recast it as a problem for which you can consider solutions. Well, it's worked for me, anyway.



 [trollcatz](#)

[October 26 2008, 22:34:45 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

Yes. Alienate the bad things. Own the rest. At least, that's the theory I'm trying to make work for me currently.



 [calanthe_b](#)

[October 26 2008, 23:05:29 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

At least, that's the theory I'm trying to make work for me currently.

...yeah making it work is the tricky bit, isn't it. ~offers hugs~



[kayjayoh](#)

[October 26 2008, 23:12:17 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

That is an excellent way of putting it, integrated systems.

Personally, I've been trying to become more mindful. Part of this is in being mindful of the things that I say and do where other people are concerned, but a large part of it has to do with me being mindful of my own body.

I am known for my tendency to slam into doorframes, table corners, and other such obstacles that most people navigate successfully. It isn't that I am just plain clumsy or lack balance. When I want to and am paying attention, I can be very graceful. I can walk for a mile on a train track rail without falling off, balance on one foot for extended periods of time, etc. It is that I'm simply not paying attention to where my body is going or what it is doing. I careen through life with my thoughts out front and my body dragging behind me like a little kid running while pulling a shaky wagon.

So I need to start being mindful of the fact that I *am* my body and that when I move through the world, my thoughts need to encompass that fact and be aware of where I am and what people and objects are around me. I might end up less bruised, for starters.



[cjtremlett](#)

[October 26 2008, 23:36:03 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

You've really articulated something I've been wrestling with for a while. I spend too much time in my own head, really. I'm not very good about dealing with myself as an integrated system, but I think I've made some progress. Nicely put!



[batwrangler](#)

[October 27 2008, 00:15:46 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

Your mom was very wise.



[boddhi_d](#)

[October 27 2008, 00:36:45 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

Form & content, yes; more of a warp & weft than a dichotomy. Though macrame might be a better metaphor-- variable number of threads and lots of knots.

I came at this viewpoint a little backwards, through an interest in media studies. I began with an interest in oral storytelling. It sprawled out into a big, unwieldy, engrossing fascination with the kaleidoscopic variations across multiple media, with lots & lots of tangents.

You described it very nicely, so I won't try to rephrase. But a couple of (hopefully) interesting points:

First, depending upon your cultural background, it's not necessarily a binary system. Many cultures perceive humans as having multiple souls, each with different functions. I'm working off of vague memories, but I seem to recall reading that in one Chinese tradition there's believed to be a sort of body-based spirit/energy force that bridges the "higher" soul to the body; this spirit dissipates at the death of the body.

Second, it's apparently universal among human societies/subgroups/time periods to perceive ourselves as having an existence beyond the body. We disagree, often radically, about what the nature of that extra-somatic self is, how it (or they) developed, and--especially--what we should do about it; but we don't disagree that there **is** something (even if it's only the illusion of something). Which, in its own way, is pretty remarkable.

 [dichroic](#)

[October 27 2008, 01:35:49 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

Yes!

One thing I notice is that I have finite resources, in a zero sum sort of way. When I stress my body a lot I get stupider. (Excessive exercise; I don't know if this would work the same way if I were healing from a major injury. I'd rather not test that.)



[trollcatz](#)

[October 27 2008, 04:17:35 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

It absolutely does. It's called postoperative or post-traumatic fatigue, and it's a well-recognized phenomenon.

 [dichroic](#)

[October 27 2008, 05:05:37 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

Not sure what I experience from exercise is quite the same thing then; it's a reaction to ongoing high levels of stress, rather than a single traumatic event. (In thinking of healing from damage, I had in mind the healing process in itself and the demands it puts on a body, rather than a reaction to an initial injury. If that makes sense, and if you can even separate them that way. I've been lucky so far and don't really have much experience with recovery, so I may well be far off-base.)



[trollcatz](#)

[October 27 2008, 12:30:04 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

Healing from heavy exercise IS healing from trauma, though. You build new muscle by filling in the microtears you've induced in the old muscle.

And posttraumatic fatigue can last **months.** It is a reaction to ongoing high levels of stress.

 [tylik](#)

[October 27 2008, 17:36:09 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

And it sucks!

(Excuse me. Spine injury + grad school is not made of win.)



[eljefe](#)

[October 27 2008, 06:39:11 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

All I can say is, it's a good thing we don't use a Windows OS.



[inaurolillium](#)

[October 27 2008, 07:57:24 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

Yeah. I'm having trouble articulating all of my thoughts about this, about being my body AND listening to my body as if it's separate, about alienating the bipolar, about a whole bunch of things, but yeah.



[trollcatz](#)

[October 27 2008, 12:33:36 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

Yeah. I keep wanting to make an analogy to marriage, where the marriage is a thing it itself and the people who make it up are only part of the bigger thing, but I'm obsessed with marriages this month. And anyway, that's not quite right, because the mind and body are much more closely linked than that. It's not two things that are woven together. It's one thing with more than one element. Like a lump of granite. It's all granite, but it's got little crystals of mica and feldspar and quartz...

Or--I know!--bread. Sure, it's flour and water and yeast and salt, but it's NOT flour and water and yeast and salt. It's BREAD.



[inaurolillium](#)

[October 27 2008, 20:18:27 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

Ooo, yes! That's excellent!



[glinda_w](#)

[October 27 2008, 16:21:26 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

Thank you for this; especially for stating it so articulately.



[kbk](#)

[October 27 2008, 20:38:56 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

This was really good to read; I'm glad I dropped by (I wander friendsfriends sometimes, and occasionally rove further).

I'm a geek. I'm depressed... no, I have depression (externalisation, working on it). I used to self-harm - the contrast of pain thing.

And this weekend I changed an aspect of my body status, and I'm still working on the surrounding issues; this post was serendipitous for me, because I was thinking of it as between intellect, emotion and depression, leaving out the body. That was kind of dumb.

So, y'know, thanks for that.

Thank you

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